

Norm Feigen and Chris Ioannou in a Grade 11 classroom: they've been teaching at Wagar since 1968.

TEDD CHURCH, GAZETTE

Generation 401

A special event on the Montreal fall social calendar is happening tonight – in Toronto. Wagar High School's class of '68 is holding its 30th-anniversary reunion. There are many success stories in that class, but the bigger story is that of an exodus spawned by three decades of political, economic and linguistic changes that have affected Montreal.

DAVID JOHNSTON
The Gazette

TONIGHT isn't the biggest night on the Montreal fall social calendar, but for demography watchers it is certainly the most significant. The 1968 graduating class of Wagar High School in Côte St. Luc is holding its 30th-anniversary class reunion.

In Toronto.
At the other end of the 401.
And the number of graduates in that '68 class?

Answer: 401.

Honest. You can look it up for yourself in the Prelude, the 1967-68 Wagar school yearbook: 40 pages of grad faces, 10 grads per page, and a 41st page with one grad on it.

You have Abramovitz, Birenbaum, Cohen, Ditzkoffsky, Epstein, Finesilver, Goldapple, Haimovitch, Ianchelevici, Jacob, Kravitz, Levine, Mendelson, Nyman, Opolsky, Prazoff, Rabinovitch, Smith, Takefman, Ungar, Vineberg, Wallfish, Xanthos, Yaffe, Zinman. You have a class that was 95 per cent Jewish, many the children of Holocaust survivors.

Today, many of those parents are dead, while those who are still among the living are by and large still residing in Côte St. Luc, where they raised their families a generation ago. But their own

children, like the children of their English-speaking gentile neighbours in Montreal, are scattered far and wide, a diaspora spawned by three decades of political, economic, and linguistic changes that have affected Montreal.

Exodus is one of the great stories of the Jews, but exodus, has also been the paramount story in English Montreal, for Jew and non-Jew, over the past generation. Statistics Canada keeps issuing updated figures on migration trends, but those figures have no faces attached to them.

Which is why the story of the 1968 Wagar graduating class is so compelling. Reunion organizers went to great lengths to contact every one of the 401 graduates, and what they discovered is the story of Jewish Montreal – and English Quebec, for that matter – in microcosm.

Here's what they found out. Of the 401 grads:

- Nine are dead.
- Sixty-eight couldn't be found.
- Of the 324 who were contacted, 164 are currently living outside Quebec; 160 in Quebec – mostly in the Montreal area, of course.
- Of the 164 no longer in Quebec, 111 are living in Ontario and concentrated in the Toronto area, 38 are living in the U.S. and 10 in Western Canada.

Please see WAGAR, Page B2

Then and now

BRONIA HECHT

A child said to a butterfly, "You live but a day." "But a day," said the butterfly, "is a lifetime."

Proto: B.B. with brown hair and brown eyes. Fav. Exp: That's beautiful; I like it. Pet Aver: Those who condemn what they do not understand. Amb: Artist and going to Toronto. Prob. Dest: Painting her face every morning before going to work. Cher Mem: Dec. 25, 66, year of 66-67 and Pink Lemonade.



BRONIA HECHT

Occupation: art teacher. Place of residence: Côte St. Luc.

Hecht was the only student in the Class of '68 who wrote in the school yearbook that her ambition in life included moving to Toronto. "At the time, Toronto was a hippy, trippy place, and Yorkville was an artist's colony," she says. Today, Hecht lives deep in the heart of Côte St. Luc, and is an art teacher – at Wagar!

JASON MOSCOVITCH

Crime doesn't pay, but the hours are good.

Proto: Bryan Watson. Fav. Exp: Good chance of that! Amb: M.P. Prob. Dest: Meat Packer. Cher Mem: A certain fight in Verdun Auditorium. Act: Hockey '64-65.



JASON MOSCOVITCH

Occupation: journalist. Place of residence: Ottawa. Moscovitch's ambition was to become a member of Parliament. Today, he reports on members of Parliament, as well as political issues affecting Canada, as chief political

correspondent of The National, the nightly television news program of the CBC.

Reunion born after 'Montreal Blues' series Then and now

WAGAR

Continued from Page B1 So there you have it. A generation later, slightly more than half of the class of '68, according to this 80-per-cent sample size, is no longer living in Quebec.

"I'm surprised, I wouldn't have thought so many were still living in Quebec," said Jason Motocvitch, a 1968 Wagar alum who is now chief political correspondent for The National, the nightly TV news program of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

"Fifty per cent still left in Quebec, 30 years later, from a school that probably delivered a lot of people into a lot of professions, that's not so bad as I would have thought," said Vaughan, Dore's another '68 Wagar alum, now an assistant deputy minister in the B.C. civil service.

"Tonight, in the atrium of posh Hazelton Lanes shopping mall in Yorkville, 150 grads from the class of '68 are expected to congregate and catch up on old memories and old friends. CJAD in Montreal, and CFRB in Toronto, will be broadcasting live from the reunion, with CJAD coverage to run from 10:30 p.m. until 2 a.m. And there's a full show for Wagar grads in Montreal to call after 10:30 p.m. to speak with their old classmates at the reunion. (800) 666-6639.

In 1968, Norm Feigen was only 24 when he was hired as Wagar's biology teacher—still young enough for the Grade 11 girls to have a crush on him. "Yeah, I still have a few of their letters and Valentines," said Feigen, one of only two teachers who taught at Wagar in 1968, still teaching at the high school today. The other is Chris Ioannou, then a history and geography teacher, now 59 and an economics teacher.

Feigen was a keeper in his rookie year, going beyond the call of duty. On afternoons when the Wagar football team played, he'd borrow a cherry-picker truck from the city of Côte St. Luc, mount the elevated platform himself and make a video of the game from a vantage point 10 metres (30 yards in 1968 language) above the action.

Then he'd press the tapes into the hands of coach Al Schreiber, who would study them endlessly, looking for an edge on the opposition. The Wagar football team won two games and lost four that year. The school was thrilled.

"This is the first time in Wagar history that the team has done so well," one student wrote in the Prelude. Success, of course, is relative, and the truth of the matter is that the Wagar class of '68 distinguished itself more for its brains than its brawn. The over-alls scholastic standing of the class was very high, and the school's very best students placed near the top in Quebec on provincial matriculation exams.

But a sign of the demographic times is that all four members of the school's Reach for the Top team that year are living outside of Quebec today. The boy with the highest marks, Norman Just, is living in Toronto, as is the girl with the highest marks, Ella Schwartz. Just is a doctor, Schwartz is a lawyer for the Ontario government.

"You go through that class and you look at the people who left and you see how indicative it is of the brain drain we've had from Montreal," said Larry Miller, a lawyer who lives in Côte St. Luc today and owns a clothing company in Montreal's north end.

ments with confirmed cases of multiple sclerosis. "It's surprising the number of people who aren't well," Zerblas said. "And it's a startling number of cases of MS. I spoke to an actuary who told me six cases for a sample size like that is very, very unusual."

The idea of a 30th anniversary reunion was born as a result of a story Zerblas wrote for the Toronto Star, on Saturday, July 27, 1998. That day, the Star devoted its edition to the theme of the "Montreal Blues," with almost every section of the paper running a story having to do with some aspect of Montreal life. Zerblas wrote about Côte St. Luc.

"After the story appeared, I started getting the most amazing mail and phone calls," Zerblas said. She came into contact with old classmate Barbara Kirschner, who contacted Claire Falner, and the three had brunch. And then the three became six from the class of '68, and then the six became a regular brunch club.

"We were never close friends, not even in high school," Zerblas said. "Then we said, 'Thirty years is coming up, we should have a party for everyone in our class now.' In Toronto, then the Montrealers found out and then we had to do the whole thing."

The six women decided that if they were going to do the lion's share of the organizational work for the reunion, then the reunion was going to be in Toronto. Simple as that. "Actually, very few people have given us grief over that," Zerblas said. "In fact, most of the grief we've gotten has been from people in Toronto who graduated from Wagar, say, in '65. They say, 'Why only '68?'"

Debbie Skurnik, a reunion organizer in Montreal, contacted a female classmate who thought she was a failure because apart from having raised two children, been a good mum and was now returning to school, she'd hadn't "done anything."

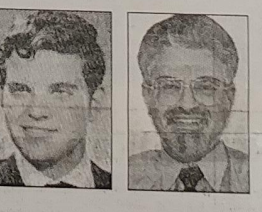
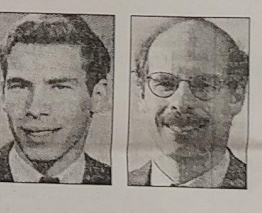
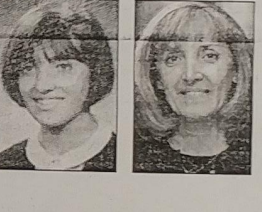
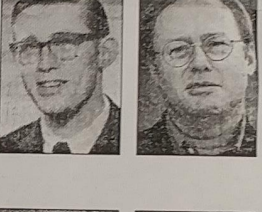
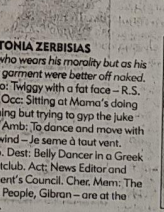
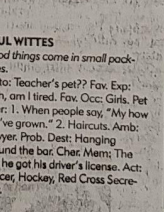
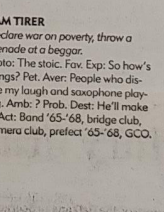
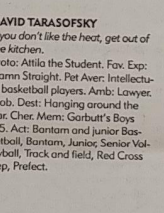
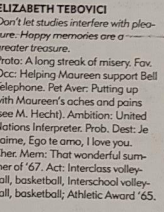
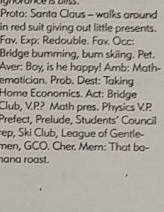
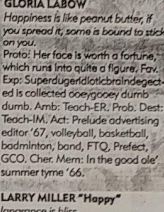
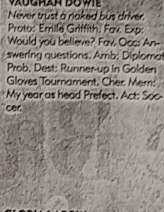
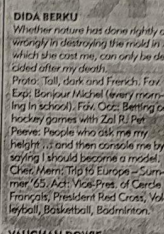
"It was actually interesting," Skurnik said of the process of contacting old classmates. "Some are looking forward to seeing old friends; others are filled with trepidation over whether they've done as well as a rival. Almost every divorced person asked if they were going to be the only divorced person there."

"There was this one girl who was unsure of coming — she didn't have fond memories of Wagar. She felt like an outsider. Then I started speaking to some of the other girls and I found out they felt like outsiders, too. Basically, we were all very insecure back then."

"High school is a cruel place," Zerblas said. "Wagar was excessively cruel. Maybe it's because a lot of the parents were immigrants or (Holocaust) survivors. A lot of parents had numbers on their arms. There were very competitive pressures — even if it was just pressure over your physical looks."

You see these competitive pressures evident in what students wrote in the yearbook. One student wrote that his ambition was simply: "To be successful." Another wrote: "It's not how you play the game, it's how you win." Seven of 20 grads contacted by this reporter didn't want to speak for attribution. There are probably students from that class who never felt they measured up in high school, and don't feel they measure up today. This is understandable. The class of '68 was exceptional for its talent, ambition and drive.

The class of '68 was young when all the political turmoil hit Quebec. Most would have been 19 during the October Crisis, the 26 when Bill 101 was passed, 29 when the Meech Lake Accord died and 44, on the cusp of middle age, when the second referendum was held. "Our generation left in two waves — the late 1970s and after 1995," said Dida Berku, today a lawyer, aspiring politician and resident of Côte St. Luc.



DIDA BERKU
Occupation: lawyer. Place of residence: Côte St. Luc. Berku, who stands 6 feet tall, is running for the Côte St. Luc council seat in the Nov. 1 municipal election. In the 1994 election, she ran unsuccessfully for the mayor's position. As a child, her parents emigrated here in Montreal from France. She was already bilingual by the time she entered Wagar.

VAUGHAN DOWIE
Occupation: administrator. Place of residence: Victoria, B.C. Dowie was Quebec's first female chief of staff in July of 1996, after having served as executive director of British Youth and Family Centre, the agency that oversees English-language child-welfare services in Quebec. Today, he is an assistant deputy minister in the British Columbia civil service, helping to supervise the reorganization of the province's child-welfare network.

GLORIA LABOW
Occupation: vice-president of a public-relations firm. Place of residence: Montreal. "I met my husband when I was in Grade 10 and never looked back," says Labow, wife of Rick Labow, CJAD traffic reporter and president of the public-relations firm where she works. They have two grown children, and recently sold their house in the West Island to move to downtown Montreal.

LARRY MILLER
Occupation: shirt manufacturer. Place of residence: Côte St. Luc. After obtaining a bachelor of science degree at McGill University in 1972, Miller went to work for the family clothing company founded by his grandfather. He is now the president and owner of L. Miller Shirts.

ELIZABETH TEBOVICI
Occupation: administrator of a private Jewish junior high school. Place of residence: Toronto. A child of Holocaust survivors, Tebovici grew up on St. Urbain St. before moving with her parents to Toronto with her husband six years ago, after her husband received an attractive job offer. "I was happy in Montreal," she says. "It wouldn't have been my choice to move."

DAVID TARAS
Occupation: author, academic. Place of residence: Calgary. Changed his legal name from Tarasofsky in 1977. A professor of political science at the University of Calgary since 1984, Taras has also acted as an adviser to the provincial government of Ralph Klein on constitutional issues. "It's a very peculiar feeling to be a citizen of Quebec and then a generation later to be analyzing Quebec for the Alberta government," he says.

SAM TIRER
Occupation: anesthesiologist. Place of residence: Norbert, Pa. Tirer graduated in medicine from McGill University in 1976. He did internships at a University of Pennsylvania teaching hospital and at the old Mount Sinai hospital in Sainte-Agathe, north of Montreal. He then obtained a green card and settled in the Philadelphia area, specializing in anesthesiology. Quebec suffers from a shortage of anesthesiologists; the shortage has lengthened waiting lists for surgery.

PAUL WITTES
Occupation: therapist. Place of residence: Westmount. After leaving Wagar, Wittes went on to get a master's degree in social work. Today he is a senior counselor with CHC Quebec, a company that offers employee-assistance programs to private industry clients, does individual and couple therapy.

ANTONIA ZERBLAS
Occupation: journalist. Place of residence: Toronto. Zerblas is television columnist for The Toronto Star, the largest-circulation newspaper in Canada. "I'm a media slut," she says. Over the past 25 years, she's made five moves back and forth between jobs in Toronto and Montreal. Her last move, Montreal to Toronto, was in 1993.

In contacting the 324 of 401 graduates, reunion organizers learned of six stu-